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ABSTRACT

This report discusses the challenges and successes in creating an education system that meets the needs of all students in Texas. The first two sections provide background information on a project investigating the achievement of students with disabilities in high achieving, high poverty Texas elementary schools, and present a framework for this state policy analysis. A third section discusses the educators and students of the Texas education system and the most notable features of school finance policies. The fourth section examines Texas schools today through the lens of reform efforts that began in the mid-1980s. Within this section, the four themes of accountability, inclusion of diverse learners, early intervention, and flexible use of funding are probed. Additionally, state technical assistance and professional development are examined. The report closes by describing key elements of the Texas education system: (1) it presents clear and concise education information; (2) it promotes an education system that includes diverse learners; (3) every component of the system is expected to focus attention on the teaching and learning process; (4) it encourages the development of consistent goals that allow flexible implementation; and (5) it uses data to identify areas in need of development. Appended are: Methodology Used for First Phase of NASDSE's (National Association of State Directors of Special Education's) Policy Analysis; list of Interview Participants; and the Interview Protocol. (Contains 29 references and 3 tables.) (CR)

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EXPECTING SUCCESS:

An Analysis of Education Policies in Texas

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The Division of State Services and Technical Assistance supports state education agencies in developing standards-based systems that enable all children to succeed. Initiatives of the division support improved methods for collecting, analyzing and using information for decision-making; development of assessment resources; creation of high-quality professional preparation and development programs; emphasis on instruction suited for diverse learners; and the removal of barriers to academic success. The division combines existing activities in the former Resource Center on Educational Equity, State Education Assessment Center, and State Leadership Center.

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The Initiative to Improve Achievement in High Poverty Schools, launched in the spring of 1995, focuses on building the capacity of state education agency officials and their local partners through effective implementation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Title I, and other federal and state programs. The Initiative, whose goal is to ensure that students in high poverty schools gain the knowledge and skills necessary for sustained success, has come to encompass a wide set of activities and products to reach these objectives. These include national working conferences, special education and extended learning initiatives, the Limited English Proficient Students Assessment Project, State Support of Alternative and Community-Based High Schools, and the High School and Immigrant Students' Project.

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An Analysis of Education Policies in Texas

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This document is a part of a series of publications by CCSSO on serving students with disabilities in high performing, high poverty schools. Also see *Expecting Success: A Study of Five High Performing, High Poverty Schools* and *Expecting Success: Self-Assessment & Resource Guide for Improving Service Delivery.*

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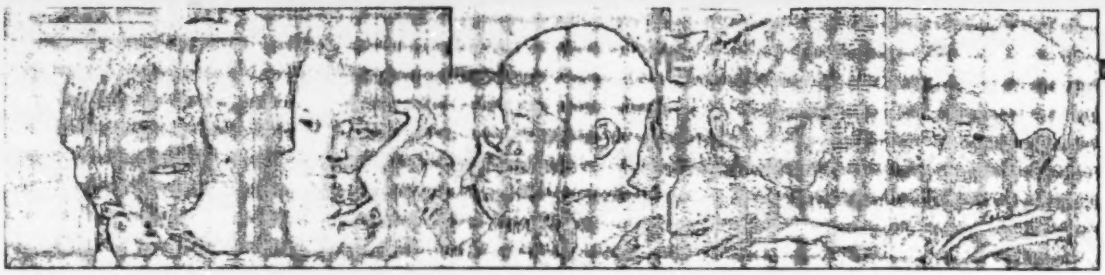

Background and Purpose

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) has provided extensive technical assistance to states and local districts to improve the performance of high poverty schools. In 1999, the U.S. Department of Education awarded funds to CCSSO to research factors that contribute to the academic success of students with disabilities in high poverty schools (CFDA 84324D). The goal of the research project was to identify and describe practices that support the achievement of students with disabilities enrolled in high achieving, high poverty elementary schools. As part of this study, the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin was asked to undertake data collection activities at five elementary schools in Texas. The Center focused on the improvement of academic achievement in high poverty schools as part of its research and dissemination projects. The five schools were selected as appropriate sites for this research because of their high achievement on state assessments despite the high proportion of economically disadvantaged and culturally diverse students attending each school. An initial review of the literature found that few studies showcase effective practices focusing on students with disabilities in the context of high poverty schools.

As part of this collaborative effort with CCSSO, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) agreed to review Texas state policies and procedures to illuminate their significance related to the achievement of students with disabilities. This analysis provides the policy context for the school-based review conducted by the Dana Center. Its focus is on state policies and practices designed to guide service delivery implementation, and it serves as a starting point for considering what state actions can support the achievement of students with disabilities in high poverty schools. The author notes, however, that this analysis is neither intended to endorse nor criticize specific aspects of the Texas education system. Individual school success or failure depends on the interaction of many complex variables. The ability of schools to implement state policies and procedures is just one of many such variables.

The structure of this analysis is intended to guide the reader through the tale of Texas' challenges and successes in creating an education system that meets the needs of all students, with special emphasis on the needs of diverse students. The first two sections, this background and the methodology, present the framework guiding this state policy analysis. A third section, an overview, discusses the educators and students who comprise the Texas education system and the most notable features of the state's school finance policies. The fourth section examines Texas schools today through the lens of reform efforts that began in the mid 1980s. Within this section, the four themes the research found to be most salient—accountability, inclusion of diverse learners, early intervention, and flexible use of funding—are probed. Additionally, a fifth theme—state technical assistance and professional development—found to infuse the four salient themes is examined. The tale of how one state educates all of its student culminates in a description of five key elements that undergird and strengthen the Texas education system.

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Theoretical Framework

Systems theory suggests that if a product is generated consistently, forces within or around the system, which comprise the product, must have combined to create the product. The Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin sought guidance with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to determine if five high achieving, high poverty schools were generating consistently positive results for students with disabilities. At the same time, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), in consultation with CCSSO, attempted to gain a better understanding of the various forces within and around the systems that have contributed to the academic successes of students with disabilities in the five elementary schools that were studied. Based on a thorough review of the literature on effective practices in both special education and high poverty schools, CCSSO identified the following systems as relevant to the academic success of students with disabilities: the promotion of accountability; program coordination; strengthening capacity of general and special education; building parent/family capacity; education services; and preventive services.

In the first phase of the NASDSE review, Texas state policies and procedures were analyzed in relationship to the broad systems outlined above.[1] Then, CCSSO project staff convened a series of meetings to discuss preliminary findings of both the Dana Center and NASDSE research. Based on these discussions, it was decided that the NASDSE policy analysis should focus on four major themes that emerged from preliminary data gathered by the Dana Center:

- Accountability;
- Services for diverse learners;
- Prevention and early intervention; and
- Flexible use of funding.

A description of state technical assistance including monitoring and professional development delivery systems was included as a fifth major theme because it was seen as being critical to understanding the process by which important information is disseminated within the state. In Spring 2001, NASDSE staff conducted in-depth on-site interviews with state, regional, and higher education representatives to obtain additional information in these areas.[2]

1 A more detailed methodology can be found in Appendix I.

2 A list of interviewees and interview protocol can be found in Appendices II and III.

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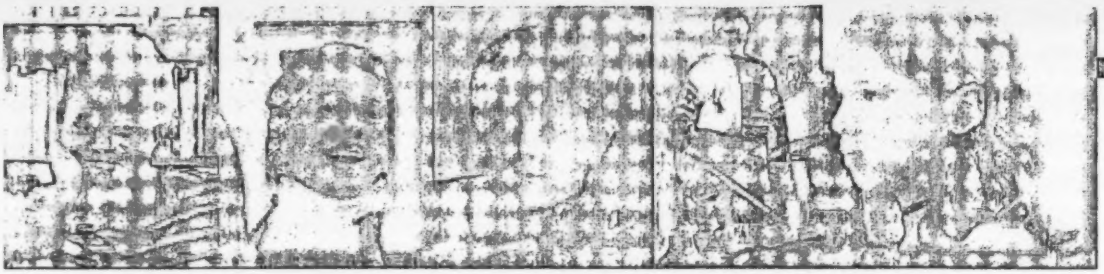

The Texas Public Education System

The considerable geographic area and vast number of cultural and ethnic groups provide unique challenges and opportunities for the Texas education system. Capitalizing on this diversity requires a large but effective school governance system. Despite its largeness, the Texas school governance system is seemingly straightforward: The State Board of Education oversees the Texas Education Agency, governed by the Commissioner of Education as the chief state school officer. Power is in turn given both to the Education Service Centers, which provide technical assistance to districts and schools, and to local school districts and education agencies responsible for providing instruction to students. With each succeeding level of governance, considerable power is passed on, such that key decision makers at each level of the educational process, including classroom teachers, have ownership and influence.

Texas Educators

State Board of Education

At the top, 15 regionally elected State Board of Education (SBOE) members govern the Texas education system. This group is given power *vis-à-vis* the Texas Education Code to be the rule-making body for education. The rules are codified in the Texas Administrative Code, which is a compilation of all official state agency rules once they become final. Board members have the ability to wield considerable power. However, a great deal of that power is passed on to the Texas Education Agency.

Texas Education Agency

The Texas Education Agency (TEA), together with the SBOE and under the direction of the Commissioner, lead and monitor all elementary and secondary state education activities. The staff members of the TEA are involved with a myriad of issues: school district accreditation; statewide assessment of students; statewide curriculum development; textbook decision-making; extensive data collection management; accountability rating; federal and state compliance monitoring; distribution of state and federal funds; and research and information program management. The TEA, however, shares technical assistance duties with the regional Education Service Centers (ESC) and decision-making power with local schools, districts and education agencies.

Education Service Centers

The 20 Education Service Centers have a dual role: to support the districts and schools in their regional areas and to provide leadership on technical assistance issues to the state. Each Education Service Center provides technical assistance to the districts in their region and statewide on topics of considerable expertise. In 1991, the Texas Legislature shifted many of the functions previously held by the TEA to the ESCs. In doing so, the ESCs became the "voice of the state" regarding technical assistance for educators.

The ESCs support their regions through various avenues: accreditation and curriculum; professional development; data collection and reporting; instructional technology; program improvement; and bilingual education, special education and Title I programs. Education Service Center professionals often work in the field, providing focused technical support to the neediest schools. Additionally, ESCs provide leadership to the state through a competitive process in which one ESC takes primary responsibility for coordinating activities around each of the priorities addressed in the state's strategic plan. Prioritization of functions among ESCs fosters state-wide consensus and greater application of best practices in education.

Local Education Agencies, School Districts and Campuses

Benefiting from the ESC's technical assistance are over a thousand Local Education Agencies (LEA) and school districts, serving about 7,000 schools with four million children from prekindergarten through grade 12.

The variation in districts and campus characteristics is huge, but not surprising given the geographic and ethnic complexity of the state. The

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largest district, Houston Independent School District, serves almost 210,000 students in 293 schools. In contrast, over 50 percent of the districts in Texas have three or fewer campuses, and more than 25 percent operate only one school.

All schools, public or charter, must adhere to the state curriculum, assessment, monitoring and accountability systems. In 1995, the Legislature established open-enrollment charter schools, which accounted for 176 schools during the 1999-2000 academic year (Texas Education Agency, 2001).

Teachers

Texas teachers number over 275,000 full-time equivalents, accounting for 83 percent of the state's professional education staff and just over half the total staff. In 1998-1999, the pupil-teacher ratio of 15.2 was lower than the national average of 16.5 (Texas Education Agency, 2001). Since then, teacher full-time equivalent positions have increased by about three percent while student enrollment increased a little over one percent, lowering the pupil-teacher ratio even more.

Despite a relatively low student-teacher ratio on average, Texas, like other states across the nation, has difficulties in recruiting teachers in high-need, urban areas. The teachers hired in such areas generally have lower than average rates of teaching experience and often lack full certification. Thus, the least experienced teachers tend to teach in the most demanding schools.

The vast majority of Texas teachers are fully certified, but certification rates are lower in critical areas, such as special education, English as a Second Language (ESL) and bilingual education.[3] Uncertified teachers in Texas can hold one or more permits of varying lengths in five categories.[4] Almost five percent of Texas teachers fall into this category, but in critical areas the number is even higher. Special education teachers top the charts, with almost 10 percent not being fully certified.

Texas Students

Students in Texas schools number nearly four million, making the Texas education system the second largest in the country.[5] White, non-Hispanic students comprise the modal group, representing 43 percent of public school students in Texas. Latinos make up the next largest student group, representing 40 percent of all students in Texas. African Americans, Native Americans, Asian/Pacific Islander and other ethnic groups make up the remaining 17 percent of Texas' student population. Urban schools tend to have a higher percentage of students of color, with rural schools following. Suburban schools generally serve the fewest.

Common measures of school poverty, such as the number of students participating in the free or reduced-price lunch program and those in Title I programs, suggest a greater number of low-income students in Texas than in the rest of the nation. In 1999-2000, 50 percent of students in Texas were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, an increase of 60 percent over 10 years. About 43 percent of Texas students participate in Title I programs, aimed at improving the achievement of economically disadvantaged students, compared to the national average of 27 percent.[6] Much of this is due, however, to the large number of Title I programs operated school-wide in Texas.

On average, 12 percent of students in Texas participate in ESL/bilingual education programs, compared with 8 percent of students nationally. In districts with the largest proportion of language minority students, 25 to 36 percent participate in English language learner (ELL) programs. Students in special education programs account for 12 percent of the total school-age population in Texas, which is on par with the national average of 12 percent.

School Finance

Budget

Of Texas' approximately $21 billion budget, about 46 percent comes from local funds (e.g. property tax revenue), 44 percent from state funds, and 8 percent from federal programs, of which 5 percent is designated for specific purposes (Texas Center for Educational Research, 1999).

Federal funds are designated to supplement existing local programs for specific groups of students and, in most cases, cannot be used in place of local or state money. State funding for education comes from three main sources: the General Revenue Fund, the Available School Fund, and the Permanent School Fund. A program entitled the *Regular Foundation School Program* grants most LEAs taxing authority and makes them eligible for state funding. This program provides

3 Other designated shortage areas are science, mathematics, foreign languages and technology application.

4 The five types of permits are nonrenewable, temporary classroom assignment, temporary exemption, emergency, and district teaching.

5 This report uses the phrase "students of color" to refer to minority students broadly: Latinos, African-Americans, Asian/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans. The terms Latino and Hispanic are used inter-changeably, as are black and African American.

6 The national average figure is based on 1996-97 data, the most recent data that could be obtained.

low-wealth districts with greater state funds than property-rich districts, resulting in more equitable funding.

Per Pupil Expenditure

According to *Education Week* (Orlofksy & Olson, 2001), in 1999 per student education spending in Texas was $6,034, which was below the national average of $6,408.[7] In spite of this, the state percentage of taxable resources spent on education was exactly the same as the national percentage at 3.7 percent, based on 1998 data. However, there is a great degree of variance in per pupil expenditures from one district to the next. In Texas, some school districts spent more than twice as much on total operating expenditures per pupil than others. Moreover, while most Texas districts spent between $4,019 and $8,146 per student in 1996-97, four counties spent more than $10,000 per student and four counties spent less than $4,000 per student on operating costs (Texas Education Agency, 1998).[8]

In sum, the Texas education system is characterized by a diversity of students, staffing and resources. However, through the sharing of power and the focus on student results, as described in the next section, all groups of students are provided opportunities to excel academically.

7 This figure is based on 1999 data from all states and was adjusted to reflect regional cost differences.

8 This range applies to 95% of all school districts.

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Texas Education Today

The Texas education system today reflects the state's long-standing commitment to standards-based reform. The programs initiated in the early 1980s as reform measures have become the texture of how Texas teaches its children. These programs are a dynamic effort; the goal is a general education program broad enough to fulfill the needs of all students but specific enough to ensure success for individual students in order to circumvent the risk of failure. Within the reform framework, four major issues are salient: accountability; inclusion of diverse learners; early intervention; and flexible use of funding. An overlay of technical assistance and professional development infuses every component of the reform effort, enabling educators to competently carry out the policies promoted by the TEA.

Accountability for Results

Texas education reform broadly began in 1983 when the Texas legislature mandated the State Board of Education to develop a standard curriculum by course and grade level. The next year, with House Bill 72, legislators directed educators to create an accountability system based on and tied to curriculum reforms. These two directives influenced school districts and campuses, student assessment, and teacher professional development, all of which were and still are closely monitored by the public.

Academic Excellence Indicator System

Work on the accountability system began in 1993 with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) working closely with local educators and other stakeholders to develop an *Accountability Manual*. This manual's purpose is to provide consistency in evaluation while recognizing diversity among schools. The Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) is the venue in which school ratings are reported to the public. The AEIS annual ratings are highly valued. Schools are rated to ensure scholastic adequacy, to recognize high achievement, and to identify and assist schools with inadequate achievement. The current 2001 ratings for schools and school districts are similar (see Table 1):

Table 1: AEIS Ratings for School Districts and Campuses

District	Campus
Exemplary	Exemplary
Recognized	Recognized
Academically Acceptable	Acceptable Academically
Unacceptable	Low-performing

Source: *2001 Accountability Manual*, Texas Education Agency.

AEIS ratings depend upon several factors: students assessment scores; dropout rate; special education compliance status; and, until 2000-2001, attendance rates. In order to provide a context for the ratings and indicators, school and district profiles include student, staff, and fiscal data. Additional indicators—such as college admission test scores and campus improvement data—are included in the AEIS but not used in the rating system.

The ratings in 1998 for both districts and campuses were comparable. Twelve percent of the districts and 16 percent of the campuses earned "exemplary" ratings. Thirty-two percent of districts and 25 percent of campuses earned "recognized" ratings. Fifty-six percent of districts and 51 percent of campuses earned either "acceptable" or "academically acceptable" ratings. And, for both districts and campuses, a scant one percent earned either an "academically unacceptable" of "low-performing" rating *(Snapshot 2000: 1998-2000 School District Profiles)*.

The impetus for districts and schools to earn high ratings on the AEIS is tangible. In addition to the public attention from these published reports, highly rated or improving districts and schools can earn monetary rewards. The highest performing districts and schools are exempted from specific regulations and requirements. The AEIS, according to local and state educators, is the writing on the wall. Educators and the community respond to it more than anything else.

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Student Assessment

In order to fulfill the mandate to "require all students to demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary to read, write, compute, problem solve, think critically, apply technology, and communicate across all subject areas" (Texas Education Code, 1997), the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) system was created. Originally implemented in 1993 and revised in 1997, its purpose is to clarify instructional objectives for each grade level and subject. A key component of TEKS is the standard for student performance. All students, with very few exceptions, must demonstrate proficiency in each of the TEKS essential elements.

Proficiency is demonstrated through assessments that reflect the increasing expectations for Texas students over the last twenty years. In the early 1980s, students took the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS), which did just that: assessed basic skills. In 1985, a more challenging Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) replaced the TABS. In 1990, the TEAMS was replaced by the more rigorous Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), a criterion-referenced assessment that is closely aligned with the TEKS. Emphasis in the TAAS was given to academic skills, (e.g., reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, and science), higher-order thinking skills, and problem-solving ability. In 2003, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), will be given to students. This assessment is more closely aligned with the TEKS, covers more subjects, and is more demanding than the eleven-year old TAAS.

Assessment of Diverse Learners

Data drive the Texas education system, including the delivery of services and assessment of programs among diverse learners. Even before the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA, which mandated that states and districts include students with disabilities in all state-wide assessment programs (20 U.S.C 1412(a) (17) (A)), the SBOE had begun efforts to do so.

All Texas students are held to the same high standards, but not all of them take the same assessment tool. In 1997, the Texas legislature mandated alternative assessments for students in grades 3 through 8 who are receiving instruction in the TEKS program but for whom the TAAS may not be an accurate measure of achievement. For students in special education programs, the admissions, review and dismissal (ARD) committee is responsible for assessment decisions. Students referred for alternative assessment are generally either not receiving instruction on grade level or they require modifications that would invalidate the TAAS results. These students represent a small minority of all students eligible for special education services. The ARD committee makes decisions on a case-by-case basis whether the standard TAAS is appropriate, what instructional level fits the child, and what, if any, accommodations are appropriate.

The need for the alternative assessment in Texas is evidenced by increasing exemption rates of students with disabilities from the TAAS (see Table 3). This emerges in part from the increasing accountability that the TEA has placed on the LEAs to include the scores of students with disabilities in AEIS. During the 1999-2000 school year, Texas pilot-tested an alternative assessment, the State-Developed Alternative Assessment (SDAA) to assess students with disabilities in grades 3 to 8 unable to use the TAAS as an appropriate measure of academic progress. The SDAA is designed in such a way as to bridge into the TAAS and is expected to become part of the school accountability system in the 2002-2003 school year.

Table 2: Inclusion of Diverse Learners in Texas Assessments: The Percentage of Students Grades 3-8 & 10 Exempted from the TAAS, 1997-2000

	1997	1998	1999	2000
All	9.4	8.9	10.6	9.8
Absent	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.6
ARD Exempt	5.3	5.2	6.9	7.1
LEP Exempt	2.4	2.3	2.2	1.3
Other	0.9	0.7	0.8	0.8

Source: Compiled from *1996-97 AEIS Reports*, 1997, Texas Education Agency; *1997-98 AEIS Reports*, 1998, Texas Education Agency; *1998-99 AEIS Reports*, 1999, Texas Education Agency; and *1999-2000 AEIS Reports*, 2000, Texas Education Agency.

For LEP students, different albeit similar rules are in place. According to the Commissioner's rules concerning the *State Plan for Educating Students with Limited English Proficiency*, LEAs must establish language proficiency assessment committees. Districts are required to have policies and procedures in place for the "selection, appointment, and training of members" of these committees (TAC, Title 19, Part II, Chapter 89.1220). The state lists criteria for who should serve on the committee. If the district does not have anyone who meets the qualifications, they may designate another professional. Nonetheless, the purpose of these committees is clear: to identify LEP students, assess their level of language fluency, recommend program placement, and determine appropriate assessments. Alternative assessments are varied: students can be exempted from the TAAS and take another assessment from the state-approved list; they can take the Spanish version of the TAAS; or, they may take the TAAS in English with appropriate accommodations.

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Targeting the Achievement Gap

Data from the TAAS are used in several ways relevant to improving achievement among diverse learners and shrinking the achievement gap.[9] First, the TAAS provides an overall perspective on the achievement of all students and student groups within a given school. School and district rankings are based on the cumulative and disaggregated achievement of four major student groups: white, black, Hispanic, and low-income students. Campuses ranked as exemplary on the AEIS must demonstrate that at least 90 percent of all white, black, Latino and low-income students pass the TAAS; recognized campuses must demonstrate passing rates of at least 80 percent among disaggregated student groups.

Second, the TAAS provides perspective on the achievement of diverse sub-groups of students, including students with disabilities and English language learners who take the Spanish TAAS. Consequently, districts and campuses can make sure that both sub-groups and the student population as a whole are achieving at appropriate levels. Third, the TAAS provides data on the inclusion and exclusion rates of diverse learners in the state accountability system, as discussed earlier. Fourth, a number of other points, such as complaints regarding civil rights violations, financial compliance reviews, and the number of students placed in alternative education programs, are gleaned from the TAAS results. These data also yield varied measures about how well a district or campus educates their students from diverse backgrounds.

The attention devoted to the achievement of student sub-groups in Texas contributes to the state's success in reducing the achievement gap in education. Generally, all student groups are making gains on the TAAS; however, some are gaining more than others. Table 2 presents the percentages of students in grades 3 and 6 passing the TAAS, which is taken in both English and Spanish. Most notable of the TAAS results are the gains for students eligible for special education services, English language learners taking the Spanish TAAS, and African-American students in grade 6 English.

Table 3: Shrinking the Achievement Gap: The Percentage of Students Passing the TAAS, 1997-2000

	1997	1998	1999	2000	Gain 1997 - 2000
Grade 3—English					
All	74	77	79	77	3
African American	58	60	60	62	4
Latino	65	69	74	71	6
White	84	86	88	86	2
Native American	71	76	78	77	7
Asian/Pacific Islander	90	91	93	90	0
Economically Disadvantaged	63	66	69	68	5
Special Education	41	44	66	66	25
Grade 3—Spanish					
All	37	55	65	66	29
Economically Disadvantaged	37	55	65	66	29
Special Education	21	30	44	53	31
Grade 6—English					
All	77	80	80	82	5
African American	60	67	67	71	11
Latino	66	69	71	73	7
White	89	91	90	91	2
Native American	81	84	82	84	3
Asian/Pacific Islander	90	91	91	93	3
Economically Disadvantaged	64	68	69	72	8
Special Education	33	36	53	60	27
Grade 6—Spanish					
All	#	22	27	26	4
Economically Disadvantaged	#	18	27	26	8
Special Education	#	9	0	31	22

Data not available

Source: Compiled from *1996-97 AEIS Reports*, 1997, Texas Education Agency; *1997-98 AEIS Reports*, 1998, Texas Education Agency; *1998-99 AEIS Reports*, 1999, Texas Education Agency; and *1999-2000 AEIS Reports*, 2000, Texas Education Agency.

[9] The achievement gap refers to historical gaps in achievement among student groups, with white, non-Hispanic and Asian American students typically performing stronger academically compared to black, Latino and Native American students; native English speakers performing more strongly on standardized assessments than students with limited English proficiency; students without disabilities performing stronger than students with disabilities; and students from affluent backgrounds performing at higher levels than students from low-income households.

Services for Diverse Learners

The Texas school-age population grew in tandem with the period of rapid reforms and standards development. During this time, two significant variables affected how Texas educators viewed services for diverse learners in the schools. First, between 1987 and 1997 the number of students with special needs increased dramatically: more than 60 percent of new students received special education services or bilingual/English as a second language services. Second, as described in the previous section, Texas' reform efforts mandated the establishment of a system in which all students learn, are appropriately assessed, and achieve high standards.

Special Services Paradigm

To spearhead the reform of special education and bilingual services, in 1993 the State Board of Education (SBOE) established a task force whose objective was to "lay the foundation for future reform, opening the door to local innovation within a broad framework defining quality education for all students . . . based on individual strengths and needs, promoting the holistic development of students in a variety of settings, and working in concert with all parties to achieve long-term goals" (Texas Education Agency, 1993, p. 5). The results of these efforts mirrored those of reform overall: a dynamic paradigm in which each component complemented and depended upon the others for success.

This paradigm stresses three areas: general and special education systems are not considered separate entities; expectations for students with disabilities are the same as for those without disabilities, as measured by accountability efforts; and the education of all students, particularly those with disabilities, is the shared responsibility of the educational community, families and students. With this mindset, both students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers benefit. Preparing educators to teach a wider array of students and to present material in varied formats results in improved educational opportunity for all students. Much of the prior and current work of the Education Service Centers aims to increase the capacity of general educators to instruct diverse learners.

Inclusion

Among all programs in Texas, the overriding theme is that the general education system blends seamlessly with special education, bilingual/English as second language programs, or other programs for diverse learners, such as Title I. While Texas demonstrates lower levels of including students with disabilities in general education classrooms compared to the national average, the students in special programs are held to the same high standards as all other students. Local school districts are responsible for implementing school-based programs that enable diverse learners to reach high standards.

For both special education and students with limited English proficiency (LEP), a twin set of ideals governs placing and serving students. First, before referring a student for special education services, great efforts are made to educate the child in the general education system using "all support services available to all students, such as tutorial, remedial, compensatory, and other services." (TAC Title 19, Part II, Chapter 89.1011) (http://www.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/ch089, p. 2). Second, if a child is in need of special education services, more effort is made for the student to spend a minimum amount of time—both in terms of percentage of the school day and in overall number of days, months, or years—outside the general education classroom. Texas Education Agency staff report that decisions to include a student in special education services are not made lightly or without due consideration of the criteria set by the state.

According to the Commissioner's policy on LEP students, the goal of bilingual and ESL programs is to enable LEP students to become competent in comprehending, speaking, reading, and writing English. The programs are expected to focus on the mastery of English language and content areas for all LEP students to enable them to participate equitably in the general education system. Such programs are required to be based on the TEKS; to be "integral parts of the total school program"; and to "use instructional approaches designed to meet the special needs of LEP students" (TAC, Title 19, Part II, Chapter 89.1201). Similar to the philosophy of students in special education programs, the goal is for students to spend minimal time away from the regular classroom if participating in pull-out type programs.

Prevention and Early Intervention

As admirable as Texas' efforts to address the needs of diverse learners are, the larger goal is more complex. Early intervention and prevention measures for at-risk children are expected to increase school readiness and reduce the number of children referred for special services in later grades. Texas' commitment to have every child read at or above level by third grade embodies these goals.

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Texas Interagency Council on Early Childhood Intervention

A key agency for increasing the readiness of students at-risk is the Texas Interagency Council on Early Childhood Intervention (ECI). Administered by the TEA and the Texas Health and Human Service Commission, ECI serves children, birth to age three, who have or are suspected of having a disability or developmental delay. Texas ECI programs are funded through Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The programs encompass a range of outreach efforts to ensure that eligible children receive a coordinated system of services unique to their needs. The available services include:

- Assistive Technology (Services & Devices)
- Audiology
- Early Identification, Screening & Assessment
- Family Counseling;
- Family Education
- Medical Services (diagnostic or evaluation services used to determine eligibility)
- Nursing Services
- Nutrition Services
- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Psychological Services
- Service Coordination
- Social Work Services
- Special Instruction
- Speech-Language Therapy
- Vision Services.

Children in need of these services are generally identified through a program entitled Child Find. Child Find's emphasis is on identifying babies and young children in need of early intervention in order to provide them with a free and appropriate education mandated by IDEA. Through outreach programs to families, communities, and professionals, the TEA mandates that LEAs "actively search" for children in order to identify and evaluate a potential disability or developmental delay.

Early Screening and Intervention in Reading

A notable effort in Texas is the implementation of a universal reading screening for grades K-2. Beginning in 1998-99, Texas law mandated that all school districts administer an early diagnostic assessment. The TEA in consultation with the Center for Academic and Reading Skills developed the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI) and its Spanish version, the *Tejas Lee*. The TPRI is aligned with TEKS and fulfills two objectives: it targets interventions for children having reading difficulties in the early grades and identifies children in need of further evaluation and more intensive interventions.

The TPRI consists of two parts: a screening and a more comprehensive assessment. In grades K-2, classroom teachers give the screening at four key times: the middle and end of kindergarten and the ends of grades 1 and 2. In grades K and 1, the focus is on phonological awareness and letter-sound. At the ends of grades 1 and 2, the assessment emphasizes word reading. If a child is not making appropriate progress, the teacher can administer a more comprehensive inventory that provides data on student strengths and weaknesses.

Teachers are provided both training and tools to enable them to use student data on the TPRI to modify reading instruction and monitor results. While the TPRI does result in a high number of students being identified as at risk for developing reading difficulties, most of these students are able to improve their reading through small-group interventions given by the teacher in short daily sessions. As such, the TPRI is an effective tool at identifying students in need of intensive interventions and preventing learning disabilities as well.

Texas Reading Initiative

The efforts to identify and serve students with disabilities or difficulties are complemented by the Texas Reading Initiative. Established in 1996 by then-governor George W. Bush, the mission of the initiative is clear: "All students will read on grade level or higher by the end of the third grade and continue reading on or above grade level throughout their schooling" (www.tea.state.tx.us/reading). This initiative is far-reaching, but the implementation of it has been carefully crafted to include a variety of components.

The Texas Center for Reading and Language Development (TCRLD) leads the multipronged effort. The Center, in partnership with the TEA Reading Department staff and other curriculum specialists, develops products to help teachers implement the Initiative. Additionally, stakeholders, such as the Governor's Business Council members, parents, elementary and secondary principals, and special education leaders, have been and continue to be actively involved in the development of Center products. The Center's most popular product is a guide entitled *Beginning Reading Instruction: Components and Features of a Research-Based Reading Program.* Published in 1997, over 200,000 copies of this valuable resource, known as the "Red Book," have been distributed throughout the state. The Center also coordinates conferences, meetings and other activities

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designed to facilitate The Reading Initiative. These include:

- Guides for administrators and teachers that outline 12 essential components of successful beginning reading programs;
- Oversight to ensure that school districts comply with state legislation requiring them to assess reading skills development in kindergarten through second grade;
- Adoption of several assessment instruments for measuring reading development, including those that examine specific elements of reading;
- Revision of an informal assessment tool recommended for classroom teachers to determine individual student progress in reading;
- Documents produced by the TEA with assistance from the Texas Mentor School Network that identify schools with demonstrated success in teaching elementary students to become effective readers;
- TEA-developed documents for parents, available in English and Spanish, that provide information and strategies for parents to help their children learn to read;
- A state partnership with the University of Texas at Austin to create a coordinated system of teacher education and professional development in reading and language arts, including resources for teachers (e.g., website, list serve); and
- Identification of a Texas Reading Initiative liaison at each of the 20 Education Service Centers to provide professional development and resource information.

Texas educators seek to coordinate these efforts to reach children at a young age in order to guide them through the education system. Doing this contributes to the desired seamless system of education where students receive services according to need rather than labels.

Flexible Use of Funding and Monitoring for Compliance

The broad objectives of the Texas education system are impressive, but operationalizing them requires more specific interpretations based on the individual needs of schools, school districts, and LEAs. Like many jurisdictions, Texas relies on a "carrot and stick" approach to formulating incentives for local schools and districts to focus on student performance. The "carrot" is the Education Flexibility Partnership Program (Ed-Flex); the "stick" is the District Effectiveness and Compliance (DEC) process. Collectively, both programs encourage local districts to pursue a strategy of continuous improvement that promotes high student performance.

Education Flexibility Partnership Program

To encourage the more effective use of funds, the TEA established the Education Flexibility Partnership Program (Ed-Flex). Ed-Flex waivers allow latitude in designing and delivering programs and in avoiding administrative requirements. For example, schools receiving Title I funds under Ed-Flex can employ school-wide Title I programs even if their percentage of low-income students falls below 50 percent, the standard threshold. However, the state has specific expectations when an Ed-Flex waiver is granted. If not already rated as an "exemplary" or "recognized" district or campus through the AEIS system, the district or campus must maintain at least an "acceptable" rating and attain a 90 percent pass rate on the TAAS reading and mathematics tests for all students and student groups. The programs funded through Ed-Flex aim to increase assessment scores, reduce administrative costs, reduce student "labeling," and improve attendance and dropout rates.

District Effectiveness and Compliance

First developed in response to a court case alleging that the Texas monitoring system was inadequate, the District Effectiveness and Compliance (DEC) process has become an integral part of the accountability movement. The DEC team makes regular visits to campuses in order to examine the extent to which they are fulfilling the Texas goal of a strong general education system that minimizes the need for special services and assures high achievement of all students.

DEC visits, which are designed to be proactive rather than reactive, are scheduled well in advance[10] and follow a pattern that enables schools to prepare for the visit and make substantive improvements to their programs and services. This pattern includes an assessment of the overall general education system with special attention given to anomalies that surface during data review. The assessment always includes parent

[10] The current system includes scheduled monitoring of all districts in a six-year cycle, which is about 200 districts a year. The monitoring division used to announce visits 14-18 months in advance. When this was criticized as allowing too much time for districts to prepare—perhaps resulting in an overly positive representation of program quality—the division began later notification, which then was criticized as not allowing enough preparation time. In January 2002, the division plans to release an announcement of schools that will be monitored for the following year.

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meetings, meetings with staff, a review of policies and procedures, and a review of a purposeful sampling of student folders. Additionally, guidelines to prepare school personnel for a DEC visit delineate compliance indicators and give examples of how documentation will be reviewed during the on-site visit. One TEA educator discussed the philosophy of the DEC visit "as a catalyst for improved services to students." As such, the process is not intended to be punitive but rather a way for campuses to remain in compliance and improve services.

Monitoring for Inclusion

The TEA District Effectiveness and Compliance (DEC) team works with the district or campus to examine the delivery of special services, suggest avenues for change and improvement, and monitor district and school efforts to achieve program excellence. In accordance with state law, districts or campuses that are 125 percent or more over the state average of students exempted from the general education assessment program receive a citation and state support is given to reach compliance. If improvements are not forthcoming, a series of interventions and sanctions are initiated. These actions range from further investigations, to withholding funding, to assigning a monitor or master educator in place of a district's special education director. Additionally, the notation of "corrective action pending" is included within the district's annual AEIS report.

Conversely, districts whose data suggest that diverse populations are being included at a higher than average rate in the general education assessment program and are demonstrating achievement among all students are rewarded. Additional funding and exemptions from regulations act as incentives to encourage the inclusion of most students in the general education assessment program and the focus on high standards for all.

Despite the pro-active approach encouraged in the DEC process, the Ed-Flex program is considered the linchpin of Texas education efforts and relative success. Giving local educators the opportunity to implement programs specific to the needs of their students, campuses, and community within the larger framework of high standards and accountability gives them a meaningful voice in determining their students' fate and common ownership of student performance.

Professional Development and Technical Assistance

Accountability, inclusion of diverse learners, early intervention, and flexible spending to ensure compliance are the paradigms of Texas education today. Professional development and technical assistance infuse every aspect of these paradigms to afford teachers the knowledge and skills they need to enhance student achievement. In the same way that the TAAS is aligned to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) curriculum, the Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS) is aligned with numerous research-based opportunities—and expectations—for educators' professional growth.

Professional Development and Assessment System

In 1995, around the same time TEKS was being revised, Senate Bill 1 mandated a new teacher appraisal system. The resulting system, aptly entitled the Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS), moved beyond traditional annual teacher appraisals to a dynamic set of guidelines emphasizing teacher professional development and learner-centered teaching that links student performance to teachers' and campus' appraisals. Although PDAS is optional, local districts and schools must use it or a school-based system founded on principles embedded in PDAS.

Texas teachers are data-driven in two ways. First, educators are encouraged to learn how accountability and classroom data can be used to guide instruction for improved student achievement. Patterns in the data are analyzed to highlight successes and draw attention to problem areas. Key indicators of progress and outcomes are identified; data is then used to inform decision-making. Second, the PDAS system gives teachers a vehicle for examining their own teaching and a framework for continuous improvement. The content of the PDAS underscores a salient feature of the Texas' system: a general education program in which all teachers are capable of teaching all learners. PDAS results are treated in much the same way students are assessed. Data are used to recognize teacher successes and highlight problem areas in need of improvement.

The strongest encouragement for the PDAS came from a professional organization, the State Board for Educator Certification, responsible for teacher certification functions previously under the purview of the TEA. Since its inception in 1995, the Board has been active. Comprised of educators from within and outside the ranks of classroom teachers and the Texas education system, the board is charged with "all aspects of the preparation, certification, continuing education,

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and standard of conduct of public school educators" (State Board for Educator Certification, 1998, p. 4). Major actions undertaken by the board include eliminating new lifetime educator certificates, implementing periodic renewal requirements, overseeing 88 teacher preparation programs, and creating the Center for the Professional Development of Teachers. When mandated to regulate itself in the same way that other professional groups do, the State Board for Educator Certification embraced the opportunity.

The reforms that began in 1983 have resulted in statewide emphasis on data and accountability for districts, campuses, teachers and students. This philosophy fosters consistency for educators to monitor themselves and their students' performance: from the youngest preschooler to the graduating senior, from novice to master teacher, and from the smallest one-school district to Houston's nearly 300 schools.

Teacher Early Intervention and Collaboration

In Texas, general education teachers are emphasized as the lead, but not sole, individual responsible for student results. Again, data drives the decisions that lead teachers and others make about specific students. Professional development plans address the need for teachers to be knowledgeable about early intervention through the analysis of student data and individualizing instruction based on data. Furthermore, since data are reported for campuses rather than individual teachers, collaboration among teachers occurs. The cumulative result of these efforts—teachers trained in early intervention, data-based decisions, and campus rather than classroom accountability—is described by one TEA representative:

> **The learner is at the center—engaged, learning, working on higher-order skills. And results are also at the center—data are analyzed with students at-risk included and their needs are considered. The performance of students as represented in the campus rating is factored into the teacher rating. It is important that each teacher be rated on the performance of the campus because teachers are then collectively responsible for all students. Rather than leading to competition among teachers, with the expectation that some will be high performers and some will be low performers, this approach facilitates collaboration and shared responsibility among colleagues. Thus, all teachers are responsible for all students. The new system has led to more vertical teaming of teachers so that progress is monitored and a smooth transition occurs at each level (personal interview, 2001).**

Coordination of Policy Changes and Professional Development

The Education Service Centers (ESC) have the primary responsibility for supporting teacher professional development and ensuring that teachers have the tools necessary for enabling high achievement among all student groups. Additionally, ESCs are charged to respond to the needs of local districts and schools within their region, anticipate and mitigate problems associated with policy changes, and serve as the primary contact for state-prioritized functions and projects.

The services provided by the ESCs are aligned with policies affecting teachers. For example, when the Texas Reading Initiative was announced in 1996, simultaneous efforts began to fulfill its mandates. Most notable of these efforts was The Texas Center for Reading and Language Arts, which developed a Reading Academy to "make sure that teachers of young children know their stuff when it comes to teaching reading" (Education Week, 2001, p. 184). Later, in 1999, a master reading teacher certificate program was created to better serve the needs of all students in attaining the reading standards set forth in the Initiative. A 2001 goal was to put a master reading teacher in each of the neediest schools.

ESCs involvement with the prediction and mitigation of problems that may arise with policy changes assures smoother transitions. For example, currently students in the tenth grade must pass math and reading exams before they can graduate. In 2003, new tests in math and reading will be introduced in the ninth grade, and science and social studies tests will be given in tenth grade. In the eleventh grade, all four of these subjects must be passed in order to graduate. In addition to more testing, more rigorous subjects—such as algebra, geometry, chemistry and physics—will be included as part of the testing system.

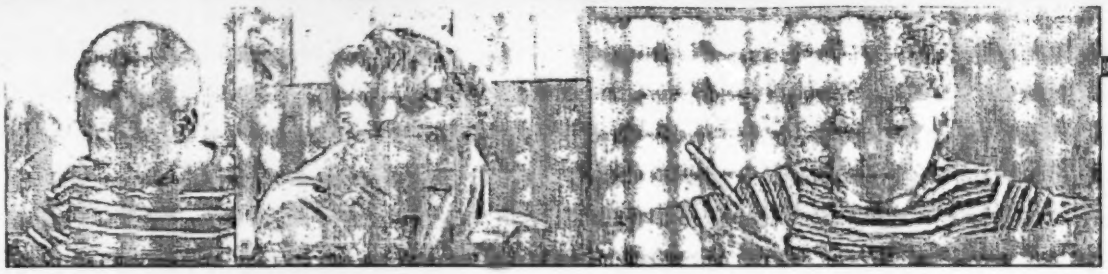
To prepare students and staff for these changes, the Accountability, Reporting and Research division of TEA with the local ESCs reviewed end-of-course tests that were taken in these subjects. Student results were used as a proxy indicator of how students would be expected to perform on the new exit tests. Students did not fare well so the division sent an "alert" memorandum to the school districts about current performance and what it might mean for the future.[11] It will be the responsibility

[11] Since the current end-of-course tests are optionally counted toward grades, the motivation for passing might be lower than for exit tests, but it was the best available proxy the TEA had to work with for how students would perform.

of the ESCs to prepare teachers in order to ease the transition. But having first identified the problem, its impact can be mitigated.

Accomplishing specific goals set forth by the state's strategic plan also falls under the purview of the ESCs. The TEA prioritizes decentralized functions and projects; ESCs compete to lead efforts under each function. The winning ESC acts as a contact for that function for all school districts and schools in the state. For example, Region 6 ESC has served as the lead agency in providing curriculum modifications via its 1993 publication *The Mystery of Modifying*, which is still widely used today. Region 4 ESC has led the efforts in assistive technology and behavior and discipline. Districts and campuses are well aware of both the ESCs' area of expertise and how their own ESC can support teachers' professional development. ESCs are an active resource and widely utilized by Texas educators.

Texas education today is the result of the reform movements begun in the 1980s. Those reform movements, emphasizing accountability, high achievement for all students, a strong general education system, and flexible use of funding, came about through purposeful planning and policy implementation. Additionally, educators were given the training and tools necessary to carry out reform efforts. The result is a well-coordinated education delivery system. The system requires vigilant attention and thoughtfulness, but a consistency of expectations guides educators every step of the way.



Conclusions

The reforms the Texas education system began in 1983 have resulted in a dynamic system focused on accountability and assessment that supports a strong general education system that meets the needs of all students. Accountability and assessment data quickly focused attention on diverse learners, such as students with disabilities, with limited English proficiency and those living in poverty. As a result, statewide strategies and interventions now are designed to address achievement gaps among various student groups. Early intervention, targeted professional development, and technical assistance activities are emphasized. These activities are expected to include careful attention to student data and individualized instructional strategies to improve student achievement. Clear outcome goals, accompanied by collaborative planning and flexible implementation, are highlighted as important components of the education delivery system. Strengthening the general education system and building capacity between general education and special programs is considered vital to the philosophy that "all teachers are responsible for all students" (personal interview, 2001).

Overall, state initiatives that consider the needs of all students from the beginning appear to positively affect students with disabilities. Staff attitudes characterized by a common responsibility to meet the needs of all students, and not only those served in their particular program, contribute to a unified system approach. In addition, the focus on preparing all students to read by third grade has resulted in training for general and special educators to serve students with disabilities, particularly those with learning disabilities, more appropriately.

Many effective state policies and practices can be gleaned from an examination of the Texas system. Many of these will come as no surprise to policymakers. Nonetheless, it is useful to see how they fit together into one state's system of accountability and on-going improvement. The following themes emerged from state document reviews and interviews with TEA, ESC and other staff regarding state policy and practice:

1. The Texas education system presents clear and concise education information. There is an overlay of simplicity within the Texas system but it is very complex when examined in detail. It is important to present information in a format that is as understandable as possible to as many people as possible (e.g., superintendents, principals, teachers, reporters). The balance is trying to communicate the system in an understandable way, while maintaining measurement precision.
2. The Texas education system promotes one education system that includes diverse learners. It is important to note that students who have historically been excluded from the general education curriculum and assessment and accountability systems are now being included. States and districts are undertaking research and initiatives to learn more about diverse student learning and demonstration of knowledge and skills attained. Ongoing assessment of system progress continues and is expected to result in higher standards, expectations and results for diverse learners.
3. Every component of the Texas education system is expected to focus attention on the teaching and learning process. Every component of the system should support improved student performance. Instructional leadership is needed from administrators at the school level with support from the district. The system needs to be aligned in such a way that each component clearly demonstrates how it is expected to enhance the education experience for all students. Formal and informal structures must be in place to encourage vertical and horizontal collaboration among staff and divisions.
4. The Texas education system encourages the development of consistent goals that allow flexible implementation. Consistency in curriculum and instruction should be found across all program areas. It is important for teachers to understand the degree to which they have included all students in ongoing progress appropriate to the learner, whether the student is expected to participate in the regular testing system or not. All teachers need the knowledge and skills necessary to diversify instruction and make accommodation for special learners. Professional development should encourage educators to identify their professional weaknesses and strengths, and seek or share skills with others. The education system must allow

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flexibility in structure, resource allocation, and program adaptation to support core goals.

5. The Texas education system uses data—and not student labels—to identify areas in need of improvement. A carefully planned and organized data system can promote early identification of problems and inform the continuous improvement process. Although state monitoring of key system indicators is important, staff at all levels must understand how data can be used to monitor student improvement and inform instruction. Focused data collection and analysis of data patterns can be vital in providing the information needed to target instruction and reduce gaps in performance.

The system may appear simple on the surface: educators share power in order to coordinate efforts to achieve a single goal. The complexity lies in how the power is shared and the ways educators strive to achieve the goal. The spirit of the system expects that all students will achieve at high levels and the language of state and federal laws allows them to do so.

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Appendix I

Methodology Used For First Phase Of NASDSE's Policy Analysis

Based on a thorough review of the literature on effective practices in both special education and in high poverty schools, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) identified the following systems as relevant to the academic success of students with disabilities:

- Systems for promoting accountability (e.g., policies that discourage exemption of students with disabilities from large-scale assessment);
- Systems that facilitate program coordination (e.g., technical assistance, coordination of education and related services);
- Systems that strengthen capacity of general and special education teachers (e.g., professional development);
- Systems that build parent/family capacity (e.g., collaboration with parents in development and implementation of individualized education programs);
- Education services (e.g., utilizing teacher assistance teams); and
- Preventative Services systems (e.g., early literacy programs).

As part of a subcontract with CCSSO, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) conducted a first-phase, broad analysis of Texas state policies related to the systems outlined above. First, the overall education reform context in the State was reviewed, since many systems initiatives grew out of the standards-based policy framework resulting from the education reform movement. Then, the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) technical assistance delivery system—along with the funding systems and structures that support the implementation of special education services and technical assistance in the state—was studied to determine how it contributes to the achievement of students with disabilities, particularly in high poverty schools. Next, teacher certification policies were reviewed for examples of alignment between state standards, professional development, and the inclusion of students with disabilities. Finally, special education policy was analyzed for ways in which the state policy shapes opportunities for students with disabilities and enables special education students to reach high standards.

A document review of the Texas Education Code, the TEA Administrative Rules, the TEA Accountability Rating System, Texas IDEA Eligibility Document: State Policies and Procedures (formally known at the State), the Professional Development and the Appraisal System, and Special Education Monitoring Guidelines was undertaken to gain insight into education services and systems that facilitate program coordination, as well as to promote accountability. The State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) agency, which is outside the Department of Education, developed a strategic plan for professional development that was considered in describing the capacity of general and special education teachers to meet the needs of all students. Statewide Technical Assistance flow charts and reports of decentralized functions carried out by Education Service Centers (ESC) provide the link between the TEA and local districts and schools. In some cases, Institutes of Higher Education (IHE) are granted contracts to provide technical assistance on specific issues. Therefore, the technical assistance delivery system was examined for systems that facilitate program coordination, promote the inclusion of students with disabilities, and strengthen the capacity of general and special education teachers. State funding structures and mechanisms also provided insight into state-initiated support for these systematic efforts.

State guidelines on preventative services systems such as early literacy programs and public documents (e.g., TEA press releases and memorandums) encouraging collaboration between schools and parents/families, were also analyzed for ways in which districts and schools support the teaching and learning of students with disabilities. Although specific practices related to education service delivery are generated at the local level, these documents provide insight into state guidance on some policy issues, such as access to the general curriculum, promotion of inclusive settings, and public reporting.

This broad analysis of Texas policies, procedures and guidelines informed subsequent meetings and conference calls with representatives from CCSSO, the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin, and NASDSE. During these discussions, researchers at the Dana Center shared preliminary findings from their comprehensive study of five high achieving, high poverty elementary schools in Texas. CCSSO project staff added additional guidance on the state policies considered relevant to supporting achievement of students with disabilities in high poverty schools. The information provided by these sources, along with input from a panel of experts convened by CCSSO, led to the narrowing of policy topics presented in this document.

Appendix II

Interview Participants

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Appendix III

Interview Protocol

Special Education Policies

I would like to discuss specific policies related to special education functions that affect service delivery and shape opportunities for students with disabilities (e.g., professional development, alignment of state and local monitoring of individual student progress).

- Where does special education intersect with the overall reform system?
- Does the state facilitate access to the general education curriculum?

  Probes: Was this guidance in place prior to the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997? How is student readiness for general education inclusion determined (e.g., students with disabilities working at grade level, assessment results, parent input)?
- What policies or practices facilitate program coordination (e.g., between special education and regular education and between education and related services)?

  Probes: Does the state or ESC provide guidance on collaboration across programs? Does the state or ESC provide guidance on pooling resources? How does the state define successful coordination of programs?
- Are there policies that build the capacity of parents and families of students with disabilities and students with disabilities who are also English language learners?

  Probes: Do policies and practices encourage parents to participate in the development and implementation of student IEPs? Are there policies that encourage involvement of parents who speak a language other than English?
- Can you talk about policies and practices that strengthen the capacity of general and special education teachers?

  Probes: Are there specific professional development opportunities for general and special educators to work in teams?
- Are there opportunities for general educators to learn about accommodations or curricular adaptations for students with and without disabilities? If so, how does the state encourage this?

  Probes: Are there specific accommodations and modifications to the curriculum shared by TEKS to a broader education audience? Do these accommodations and modifications in instruction align with the state assessment? Does the state encourage general educators to rely on special educators as consultants on issues of accommodations and curricular adaptations?

  Are special educators encouraged to expand their knowledge of content or TEKS?
- Are there any policies or practices that encourage new general education teachers to develop knowledge and skills in areas of accommodation and differentiated instruction?

  Probes: Does the licensing or induction of teachers require these skills?
- What policies, practices or other factors affect program coordination? Are there any specific professional development, funding or other initiatives aimed at facilitating coordination among programs?
- Does the state or ESC provide guidance or training on using data to inform decision-making?

  Probes: Are the data used to identify gaps in learning? Does the state encourage specific strategies to address identified problems?
- Does the state provide technical assistance on monitoring and assessing student progress in special education?
- Does the state ensure that districts offer a continuum of special education services? Does the state monitor least restrictive environment at the local level?

  Probe: What are the consequences for districts found to be out of compliance by the state?
- Is the special education curriculum and assessment system aligned to general education or special education IEP goals? If so, does special education monitor the extent to which students with disabilities are working towards the same goals as their non-disabled peers at the school level? How is this issue (of alignment of goals) communicated to the districts?
- Are there any specific state policies or practices about special education dismissal decisions?
- What is the process that the state advocates for considering referrals to special education? Are there any specific policies or guidance on the referral process?
- How does the state encourage involvement of the general education teacher in the IEP process?

  Probes: How does the state define successful engagement of the general education teacher in this process? Does the state or ESC provide technical

assistance to facilitate integration of special education and bilingual personnel?

- Is the state facilitating integrated planning at the district level?

  Probes: Does the state encourage the use of crosscutting teams for planning or does each division plan separately? Who integrates the programmatic approach (e.g., ESCs)? If crosscutting teams are used, what is the degree of collaboration that takes place?
- Does the state require or support bilingual certification training for general educators, special educators and other personnel? Please explain.
- Does the state work with Higher Education to address professional development issues?

  Probe: Bilingual certification, accommodations and modifications, differentiated instruction?

Technical Assistance & Information Dissemination

The next set of questions deals with the capacity of districts and schools to provide access to the general education curriculum and facilitate learning in inclusive settings. Specifically, we are interested in how the state network of technical assistance and information dissemination promote district capacity in these areas.[12]

- What kind of resources and services are used to promote capacity?

  Probes: Are there specific professional development opportunities for general and special educators to work in teams? Are there opportunities for general educators to learn about accommodations or curricular adaptations? Are special educators encouraged to expand their knowledge of content/ TEKS?
- Who provides the information or skill development training?
- How do the local districts or schools pay for these services?
- How are state policymakers (e.g., legislature, TEA, Commissioner of Education, State Board of Education, State Board of Educator Certification, and ESC) linked to ensure that a common message is released on education issues?

  Probes: What is the structure of the system? Does the ESC disseminate policies and guidelines to the local level? Does this include families or is there a separate network, such as parent centers, charged with getting information to families? Are there other ways that linkages are made?
- How is progress of students with disabilities tied to the TEKS?
- Does the state or ESC provide guidance or training on using data to inform decision-making?

  Probes: Are the data used to identify gaps in learning? Does the state encourage specific strategies to address identified problems?
- Can you explain how state policies and practices influence the way education services are delivered to enhance the academic success of students with disabilities? (Note: May be solely local responsibility)

  Probes: Are there specific guidelines that refer to the manner in which services should be delivered to enhance success of students with disabilities? How about for students in high poverty schools or students with limited English proficiency?
- What policies or practices, if any, promote the delivery of preventative services, such as early literacy programs?

Funding Systems and Structures

Now, I would like to focus on how decentralized the funding system is within the state.

- How much flexibility is given to ESCs and local districts in regard to spending?
- Can you talk about any state targeted funding, specific grant initiatives, and other state-funded resources that relate to supporting improvement in the teaching and learning of students with disabilities?
- Please describe any flexible uses of funds or cost-sharing activities promoted through state policy guidelines.

  Probes: Is Ed-Flex utilized by many LEAs? Please explain. Does the state disseminate information about the use and flexibility of federal funds? Does the state target the use of discretionary funds for a specific purpose?

[12] Local schools participating in the Dana Center research did not identify the use of ESC resources to improve student outcomes.

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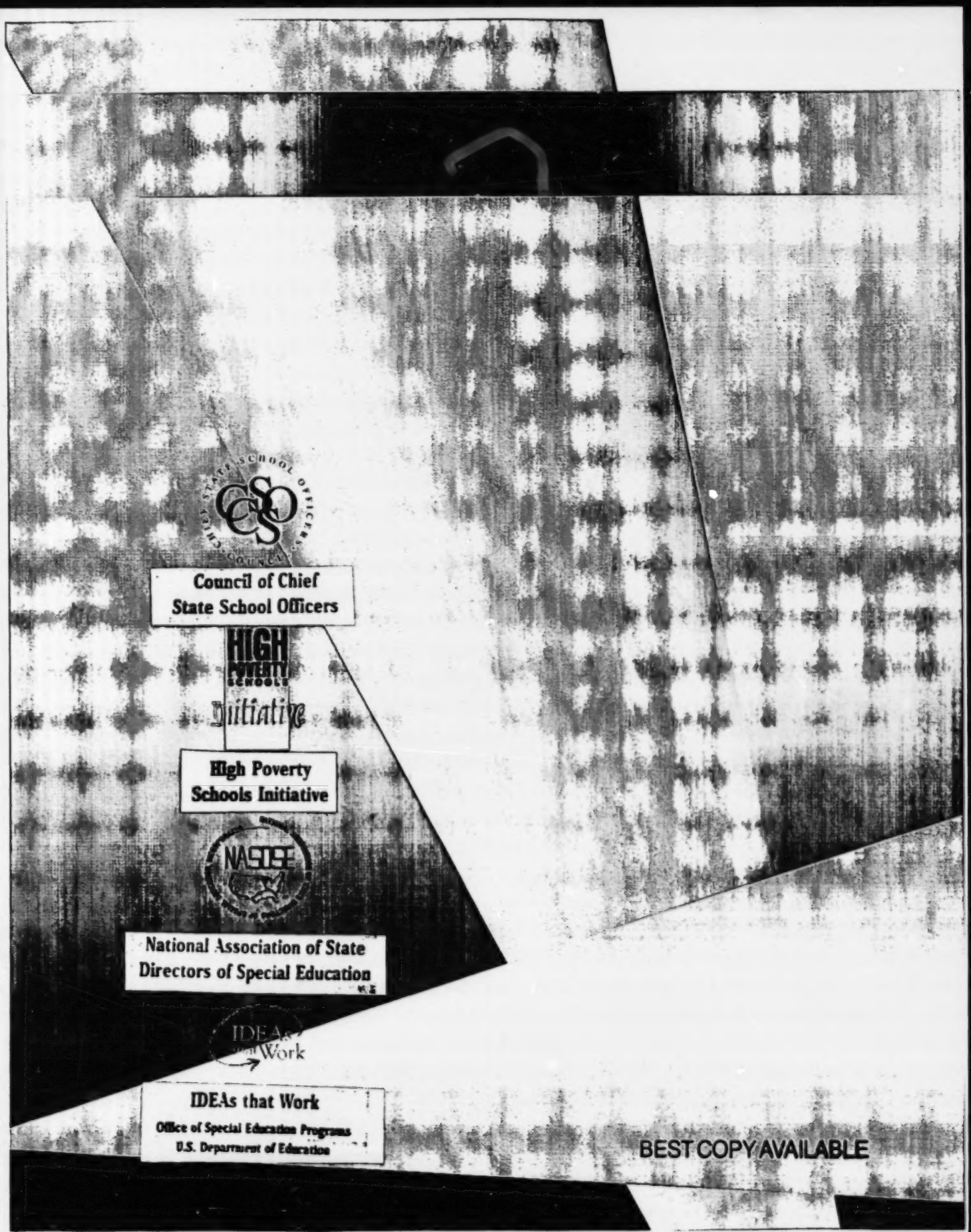
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